United Nations A/56/509

General Assembly

Distr.: General
26 October 2001

Original: English

Fifty-sixth session
Agenda item 98 (f)
Environment and sustainable development: protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind

Outcome of the sessions of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to submit to the General Assembly, pursuant to its decision 55/443 of 20 December 2000, the report of the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.*

* The report was delayed in order to incorporate the outcome of the second part of the sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held from 16 to 27 July 2001.

01-60606 (E) 081101

Report of the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change on protection of global climate change for present and future generations of mankind

1. The General Assembly, by decision 55/443 of 20 December 2000, requested the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to report to the Assembly at its fifty-sixth session on the work of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention. The present report is submitted in response to that request.

I. Outcome of the fourth session of the Conference of the Parties

2. The Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change held its fourth session at Buenos Aires, from 2 to 14 November 1998. It adopted the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (FCCC/CP/1998/16/Add.1, decision 7/CP.4), which consists of elements to strengthen the implementation of the Convention and complete modalities for the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol to the Convention. The Buenos Aires Plan of Action consists of six decisions, on:

(a) The Global Environment Facility, which was confirmed as an entity entrusted with operation of the financial mechanism of the Convention, to be reviewed at four-year intervals;

(b) The development and transfer of technology to developing countries, for which a consultative process was to be established to consider a list of specific issues and associated questions;

(c) Addressing the specific needs and concerns of developing countries arising from the adverse effects of climate change, including minimization of adverse impacts of the implementation of response measures;

(d) Activities implemented jointly under the pilot phase, which would include capacity-building, especially in developing countries that so far lacked experience;

(e) The development of the relevant rules, procedures and guidelines of the mechanisms under the Kyoto Protocol;

(f) Preparations for the first session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the parties to the Kyoto Protocol, including work related to compliance and to policies and measures for the mitigation of climate change. The sixth session of the Conference of the Parties was to be the deadline for the completion of work related to the Buenos Aires Plan of Action.

II. Outcome of the fifth session of the Conference of the Parties

3. The fifth session of the Conference of the Parties was held at Bonn, Germany, from 25 October to 5 November 1999. The session advanced the implementation of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action. Several countries called for the Kyoto Protocol to be ratified so that it could enter into force in 2002 as one of the markers of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held at Johannesburg, South Africa, in September 2002. New guidelines were adopted for the national communications by industrialized countries (Parties included in annex I to the Convention) and for the technical review of their inventories. These were important steps towards the degree of rigour that would be necessary under the Kyoto Protocol. In parallel, a new process was launched for the improvement of initial communications by developing countries (Parties not included in annex I to the Convention). The Consultative Group of Experts, composed of five experts from each of the developing country regions (Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean), six experts from industrialized countries and three experts from organizations with relevant experience, was established. In addition, the Conference launched country-driven assessments of capacity-building needs for developing countries and countries with economies in transition, with a view to making the delivery of financial and technical support from existing resources more responsive to the evolving needs of those countries.

III. Outcome of the sixth session of the Conference of the Parties

4. The first part of the sixth session of the Conference of the Parties was held in The Hague, from 13 to 25 November 2000. Its outcome was inconclusive. The session was suspended and the President of the Conference was requested to seek advice on the desirability of resuming the session in order to complete the work on texts and adopt a comprehensive and balanced package of decisions on all issues covered by the Buenos Aires Plan of Action. The President convened two informal high-level consultations in New York, on 20 and 21 April 2001, and at Scheveningen, The Hague on 27 and 28 June 2001. The meetings, which were attended by Governments at the ministerial level, provided comments on proposals made by the President. The second part of the sixth session of the Conference of the Parties was held at Bonn, Germany from 16 to 27 July 2001. The core elements of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action were agreed upon by ministers at that session.

5. On the basis of the political agreement, draft decisions on elements to strengthen the implementation of the Convention and the Protocol were agreed and forwarded for adoption by the Conference at its seventh session. The need for more funding to assist developing countries in addressing climate change was recognized. Two new funds are to be established under the Convention and managed by the Global Environment Facility: a special fund to finance adaptation, transfer of technologies, emission reduction and assistance to developing country parties in diversifying their economies, and the fund to support the least developed countries in implementing the Convention, and in particular in addressing their adaptation needs. Another fund is to be established under the Kyoto Protocol, the adaptation fund, which is also to be managed by the Global Environment Facility and is to finance adaptation projects/programmes from the share of proceeds of the clean development mechanism (2 per cent of certified emission reductions) and from other sources of funding. Consensus was achieved on the framework for meaningful and effective actions for increasing and improving the transfer of and access to environmentally sound technologies and know-how, including activities relating to needs assessments, information, enabling environments, capacity-building and mechanisms for the transfer of technology. An expert group on the transfer of technology has been established to identify ways in which to facilitate and advance the activities identified in the framework. Activities related to adaptation to the adverse effects of climate change, as well as activities to address the negative impacts of climate change, are to be supported through several channels. Industrialized countries have committed themselves to strive to prevent or minimize adverse effects on developing countries in the course of taking action in relation to climate change.

6. The draft decisions for the Kyoto Protocol mechanisms on land use, land-use change and forestry and the compliance mechanism are not yet complete. They have been forwarded to the seventh session of the Conference of the Parties, to be held at Marrakech, Morocco, from 29 October to 9 November 2001, for completion and adoption. The draft decisions contain a workable set of rules for all three mechanisms under the Kyoto Protocol. There is agreement on principles as a guide for land use, land-use change and forestry activities, with limits for the controlled use of sinks to meet initial targets, and it was agreed that credible and transparent accounting systems would be established. Parties have also agreed to establish a compliance committee, with a facilitative branch and an enforcement branch. The approach to compliance is to emphasize its facilitation and promotion. Consequences of non-compliance with emission targets have been defined. Agreement on these draft decisions will establish the modalities for the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol.

7. Progress is being made in promoting policy coherence with other conventions related to sustainable development. For example, a joint liaison group is being formed with the secretariats of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, to assess linkages among the conventions and to promote cooperation and coherence. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Technology and Economic Assessment Panel established under the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer are addressing ways and means of limiting emissions of hydrofluorocarbons and perfluorocarbons, which have high global warming potential and are used as replacements for ozone-

depleting substances. The Intergovernmental Panel is preparing a technical paper on linkages among climate change, biodiversity and desertification.

IV. Institutional linkage

8. It may be recalled that the institutional linkage of the secretariat for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to the United Nations was initially approved by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention in 1995. It was decided that the Convention secretariat should be institutionally linked to the United Nations, while not being fully integrated into the work programme and management structure of any particular department or programme. The Conference also accepted arrangements proposed by the Secretary-General for the provision of administrative support to the Convention secretariat. Corresponding action was taken by the General Assembly at its fiftieth session. As regards administrative support, the Executive Secretary, in agreement with the Department of Management of the United Nations Secretariat, has gradually taken over most of the responsibility for the financial and personnel administration of the Convention secretariat. On the financial side, audit payroll, investment, treasury and accounting are provided on a cost-per-service basis by the United Nations Office at Geneva. Further adjustments are being considered as the Convention secretariat seeks to ensure self-sufficiency in administrative matters.

9. The institutional linkage of the Convention secretariat to the United Nations, and the related administrative arrangements as they have developed, have provided and continue to provide a sound basis for the day-to-day functioning of the Convention secretariat, as well as the necessary bridge to the United Nations Secretariat at Headquarters. The arrangements clearly define the accountability of the Executive Secretary to the Conference of the Parties and to the Secretary-General and, at the same time, delineate the responsibility of the United Nations in providing the necessary support services as well as advice to the Executive Secretary, when requested. The Executive Secretary reports to the Secretary-General on administrative matters through the Under-Secretary-General for Management, and on other matters through the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs.

10. At the second part of its sixth session, the Conference of the Parties approved the continuation of the current institutional linkage of the Convention secretariat to the United Nations and the related administrative arrangements for a further five-year period, to be reviewed by both the General Assembly and the Conference of the Parties not later than 31 December 2006. It invited the Secretary-General to seek the endorsement of the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session for the continuation of the institutional linkage for a further five years.

11. The Secretary-General has recommended that the General Assembly, pursuant to the request of the Conference of the Parties at its sixth session, approve the continuation of the current institutional linkage and related administrative arrangements for a further five-year period, to be reviewed by both bodies not later than 31 December 2006 (see A/56/385, para. 14).